



Division of Spill Prevention and Response

Geographic Response Strategies for Northwest Arctic, Alaska

[State of Alaska](#) > [DEC](#) > [SPAR](#) > [PERP](#) > [GRS](#)

Northwest Arctic GRS Public Information Homepage



This website describes the process used to develop Geographic Response Strategies (GRS) to protect sensitive coastal environments in the Northwest Arctic (NWA) Subarea.

GRS' are oil spill response plans tailored to protect a specific sensitive area from oil impacts following a spill. These response plans are map-based strategies that can save time during the critical first few hours of an oil spill response. They show responders where sensitive areas are located and where to place oil spill protection resources. These plans have been developed in other regions of Alaska and they can be reviewed [here](#).

These oil spill response strategies will be part of the NWA Subarea Contingency Plan. Alaska is divided into 10 regions and each region has a Subarea Contingency Plan that directs the state and federal actions in a response to the release of hazardous substances and oil spills. More information on these plans is available [here](#).

The NWA Subarea consists of the lands encompassed by the Northwest Arctic Borough and the Bering Straits Regional Corporation. For the purpose of developing these geographic response strategies the subarea has been further divided into 3 zones, which are shown on the following map. Text links to the zones are listed below the map.



[Download](#) (225KB pdf) a printable copy of this map in pdf format.

[Northern Northwest Arctic Zone](#)
[Southern Northwest Arctic Zone](#)
[Saint Lawrence Island Zone](#)

Quick Links...

- › [GRS Home](#)
- › [GRS Areas Index](#)
- › [Frequently-asked questions](#)
- › [Site map](#)

Northwest Arctic...

- › [Northwest Arctic Home](#)
- › [Northwest Arctic Workgroup](#)
- › [Northern Zone](#)
- › [Southern Zone](#)
- › [Saint Lawrence Island Zone](#)

Primary Project Participants...

- › [Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation](#)
- › [City of Kotzebue](#)
- › [City of Nome](#)
- › [Northwest Arctic Borough](#)
- › [Maniilaq](#)
- › [Oceana](#)
- › [Department of the Interior, US National Park Service](#)
- › [Native Village of Kotzebue](#)
- › [United States Coast Guard 17th District](#)
- › [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- › [Alaska Chadux Corporation](#)
- › [Alaska Department of Fish & Game](#)
- › [Alaska Department of Natural Resources](#)

On each map sensitive, areas have been identified and listed. A Site Selection Matrix has been developed that describes the resources at each of these candidate sites. This is available for review [here](#) and the key for the symbols is [here](#). This is the first draft of the list of sites and other may be added to allow for additional input and reflect local concern. The areas that will receive a GRS will be selected from this list of candidate sites.

The NWA GRS Site Selection Process

A workgroup has been formed to develop GRS for the NWA Subarea. Participants include Local, State and Federal agencies, spill response experts, oil spill contingency plan holders. The workgroup will select the sensitive sites that will have these strategies developed to protect in the event of an oil spill and review and approve the plans after they completed.

The first step in the GRS site selection process will be to identify candidate sites. Candidate sites are identified based on a set of three major site selection criteria.

- environmental sensitivity,
- risk of being impacted from a water borne spill; and
- feasibility of successfully protecting the site with existing technology.

Public comments are also considered during site selection and the sites selected by the workgroup will consider this input. Once GRS site selection is finalized, the workgroup will develop strategies for each site.

The potential GRS locations identified in the site selection matrix were selected based on the following criteria of environmental sensitivity, which are set forth in the NWA Subarea Plan:

- Threatened and Endangered Species/Habitats
- Subsistence Harvest Areas
- Marshes
- Eel grass beds
- Sheltered Tidal Flats
- Sheltered Rocky Shores
- Seal Haulouts
- Sea Lion Rookeries and Haulouts
- Walrus Rookeries and haulouts
- Large Seabird Colonies
- Waterfowl and Shorebird Spring, Fall or Winter Concentration Areas
- Large Anadromous Fish Streams
- Intertidal Salmon Spawning Areas
- Herring Spawning Areas
- Federal Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Natural Landmarks
- State Refuges, Sanctuaries, and Critical Habitat Areas
- Cultural Resources/Archaeological Sites
- Intertidal Sites
- High Use Commercial Fishing Areas
- High Use Recreational Areas

Public involvement is essential to ensure that the sites selected and the strategies developed reflected the environmental protection priorities of local communities, stakeholders, and resource users. The workgroup welcomes public input to ensure that everyone with a stake in Northwest Arctic is made aware of Geographic Response Strategies and their importance during an oil spill response.

The Northwest Arctic GRS

The NWA Subarea Contingency Plan can be found at the following url:
http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/plans/scp_nw.htm

The following is an example from the Kodiak Subarea of how the final NWA GRS documents will appear in the subarea plan:

- Table of Contents
- Part 1.Introduction including:
 - Purpose and Scope
 - How to Use this Document
 - Who to Contact for Input
 - How the Document was Developed
 - How Sites were Selected
- Part 2.General Protection/Collection Tactics including
 - A vessel classification system
 - Detailed descriptions and drawings of tactics that may be used to protect sensitive areas in the NWA Subarea
- Part 3.Site-specific Geographic Response Strategies including
 - Index Map
 - Site Descriptions
 - Reference Maps
 - Overall Site Photo
 - Shoreline Description and Information
 - Sensitive Resource Description (by seasons)
 - Scope of Plan
 - Site-specific Logistical Information
- Part 4.References

You can learn more about Geographic Response Strategies by reading our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

For more information about the Geographic Response Strategies or questions pertaining to this project, please contact: dec.spar.grs@alaska.gov

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